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AFRICA

Dr. Pohlman's ---  
Stories + Incidents

54

# Pen-Pictures of Our African Missions.



EXTRACTS  
FROM  
DR. POHLMAN'S  
LETTERS.



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GLIMPSES OF HOME LIFE.—As I look out of my door, this is what I see: a lot of boys playing in the mission yard—they laugh, jump, tussle, roll hoop, play marbles (with coffee berries), and are having a good time in general. It is their “off hour,” for shortly they will each take a half bushel basket and start with it on their heads for the coffee farm to pick the beautiful berries and “tote” them back on their heads. The girls go to another part of the farm and do the same kind of work. It is not hard and they seem to enjoy it. In a couple of months the crop will be in, and then school will open and they will begin to study. In the beautiful moonlight nights we are now having they play till half-past nine out on the playground. What impresses us most is that there is not the least scramble for “being first,” as among our children at home. They yield so gracefully to one another. No pouting, no sulking, no crowding to be in the lead. And this is characteristic of the native. One is elected to be “head” and the others all follow. In all their plays this is

noticeable. They are so amiable, loving, gentle and "nice" about their games and plays, that one is rarely hurt. This is true of boys as well as of girls. They treat each other far more courteously than our children at home. For the time being we forget we are in heathendom. With all the noise, not a cross word has been heard, not a black look, not a push, not a semblance of petulance. There are so many lovable traits about these negroes. Though their faces are black, they always look happy.

Every afternoon at 5 o'clock they all come into the chapel and repeat a verse of Scripture. We then sing, pray and read the Bible. After tea, we often gather the children into the parlor and have some music, games, and a looking over "picture-books." This is always a pleasant hour, for it gives an opportunity to talk freely to every one, and it is surprising how much at home even the newest children feel in a short time. On Sundays, we have a morning service at 7 o'clock, led by the pastor; at eleven, regular church service; at one, Sunday-school, and at five, a young peoples' service. After the morning service, I often hold a service at the country kitchen, where our native wage-hands and other natives are to be found.

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"He don die, come quick!" That is the cry that startled us last night. On investigation, we learned that one of our little fellows had been looking for birds' nests up in the big plum tree, and, the branches being slippery from the last six days' continual rains, he fell from the top branches, striking against all the lower ones in

his descent, landing on his head with a heavy thump, and raising a lump on his scull-cap as large as the egg he did'nt get. He was tenderly lifted up by one of our older boys and carried to our parlor sitting-room. It is wonderful to see the gentleness of these boys when they understand that you want them to do this kind of work "softly." A careful examination showed no bones broken, but lots of bruises, with a cheek cut. All night the lad lay moaning, while four of the older boys kept watch, reading their Bibles and looking at the illustrated papers to keep awake. This boy's name is Albert H. Studebaker, close and intimate friend of Frank P. Manhart, who recently had a bad fall from the loft in which he was sleeping. It keeps us in close touch with the big men at home to have their name-sakes here. Some day, when the boys grow larger, we will tell them who it is that we have named them after, and try to train them up in the same kind of work as those whose names they bear. For the most part, these youngsters do very well. Only occasionally they need the rod instead of the kind word. Recently it became necessary to give Luther Kuhlmann a sound thrashing, because he thought he could get out of doing "his part of work." It was a fine opportunity to tell him how faithful and hard a worker is his name-sake. Brethren, pray for these little black saints in embryo, for they may yet work a mighty change here.

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WEATHER.--This is the season when we have what is known as "weather" in April at home. You wake up in the morning to hear the rain-drops beating on the iron roof, you go to bed at night and fall asleep to the music of the steady

“drip-drop” of the big drops from the eaves of the house, you eat your meals accompanied by the howling of the wind and the rush of the storm as it beats now on this side and now on that, you conduct morning and evening prayers while the heavens hang heavy with waters eager to fall faster than gravitation lets them, you go to see the sick tucked snugly in a rubber coat, boots and a slouch hat, while the umbrella only shows how much rain it can't keep off. You take off damp clothing at night and put on damp clothing in the morning, you light the damp wood with a match-box and kerosene oil, you cook with pepper clogged, salt wet, macaroni mouldy and spices generally spiceless; you start the laundry to wash early Monday morning and are glad if half of it is dry enough to iron by Saturday night; you begin your study to find after a while that there seems to be water even on your brain, for all the thought that you seem to have, while the dull ache creeps slowly up your back and you wonder whether at your age you are already suffering with rheumatism. On taking a stiff dose of quinine and phenacetine, you find that it was only the “Ager” that's troubling your bones. Everything you touch has a damp wet feeling, and you wish you could feel dry for once; then you light the oil stove and dry and warm yourself in front and find that the dampness has only been sent to the back of your body. Yes, this is weather.

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HOLIDAYS.--This year (1898) we had a great Christmas! The chapel platform was rich with palm-trees, while the parlor had palm branches thickly clustered around it, filled with tree ornaments like those we use at home. The girls' school-room was transformed into a bower of

palm leaves, which likewise were filled with ornaments, dolls and small gifts.

A week before Christmas the eyes of the boys grew big as saucers at the sight of boxes and barrels that came from America. They knew that "Christmas lived there." As these were opened they stood around, eager to help—and incidentally to see what the many bundles contained. Six months before the boys had asked for some drums and fifes. For these they watched expectantly, and when they saw them cried out: "Dem drums don come, an' de fifes, too don come!" The good folks at home had remembered our children very generously, both in quantity and assortment. It would have abundantly repaid every donor could they have seen the curiously pleased faces and heard the delighted cries, as the children saw first this and then that toy or article of value in their gifts. "Look dar!" "See dat!" "Hi, ain't dat fine for true!" "See my 'spenders!" "Look at my doll-baby!" Boys and girls were alike in their demonstrations of joy. Yes, it was a big Christmas!

Again has the "Glorious 4th" of Liberia been celebrated in this land of liberty. The 26th of July is the "Independence Day" of the people of this little republic on the West Coast of Africa. It is now near dark. For hours those dusky "pickaninnies" have been having a good time. And how they have rigged themselves out! The boys sewed white tape up the sides of their trousers, bound colored kerchiefs around their elbows and waists and armed themselves with sticks (for guns), rough wooden swords, and, with half a dozen empty five-gallon oil cans (for drums), have made the hours of the day noisy with their juvenile military spectacle.

“Shoulder arms!” Every stick goes up in the air.

“Take ‘em down again!” and they drop to the ground.

“Salute de President!” Every stick is given a flourish.

“Forward, march, sachay right, march, close open ranks. Break ranks and git into line again!”

This is one order! They got! What marching! One file goes this way and the other that. Their movements might puzzle a West Point drill master, but the boys enjoy it.

While the boys are “playing soldier” the girls are also imbued by the martial spirit for a while and march by themselves, though they do not look like formidable amazons in their clean new dresses.

Thus ended our 26th, the fiftieth of Liberia’s independence. Long may she live and do good to her own kith and kin, and point them up to the “Author of Liberty” (1898).

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WORK AMONG THE GIRLS.—We have been “moving.” The new lady missionaries, after four and a half months’ of acclimating, “took up arms against the sea of troubles” and started to cross the Rubicon—the Rubicon in this case being the river St. Paul, which divides the girls’ work, on one side of its banks, from that of the boys’ on the other of the river. The “arms” in this case were quite formidable, consisting of an entire outfit of house-cleaning



apparatus, with which they made the dirt fly, said dirt differing somewhat from same-named material at home, in that it was more African in its nature, consisting largely of masses of spider-webs, bug-a-bug nests, wood-lice, haunts, insects' habitats, etc.

Then came the moving. Household effects, dogs, poll-parrots, school supplies, wearing apparel, chop, and, last and most important, the little girls. This began on September 26th, and when everything had been taken across the river in large canoes, the "Emma V. Day Memorial School for Girls" was started in Muhlenberg Mission. The school was practically opened on Sunday, October 2, when services were held in the school-room. We commended the work to God's hands, invoking His blessing upon it, and asked him to carry out what had been the cherished plan of the saint in whose name the school was founded.

The latest addition to the work of the mission is in the girls' school, and consists of nothing more euphonious in name than a plain sewing circle for women. This meets once a month. Women come for miles to attend the meetings. They have Bible reading, prayer and singing. They talk and eat and sew. But this is not all. They learn to know each other better, get into touch with the mission, see the workings of the school, are taught to cut and sew plain garments, hear articles read from magazines, are entertained by the two workers at the head of the school, and in many ways are given a broader cutlook of the world and have their inner life deepened. It is a little leaven. It will show later on by its fruit. In the meantime, they greatly appreciate the opportunity afforded them.

A King's Daughters Circle has also been formed in this school, and the older girls drawn into it. Others from the neighborhood will soon be associated with the circle, and the King will have many daughters who will render him loving service.

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EVANGELISTIC WORK.--We paid a visit to one of our neighboring towns just before the communion services, to press the invitation to attend church. Here we found a number of the people in one of their country kitchens. We made it a regular pastoral visit. We urged the necessity of their coming regularly. They plead: "We no got clothes for dem ch'rch; we coffee doan bring nottin' at de stor'; de coppers is scarce; de pieanninies dey cries in de ch'rch; an' we can't come annyhow, for we clothes is bad." Then we quoted the "I pray thee have me excused" parable, and asked them what they could carry into heaven with them after death. We pointed out the need of the "wedding garment" which could be had "without money and without price;" and told them of the pressing invitation of the king to the feast. Then we pictured the glories of the heavenly home as compared to that of earth, and of the love of God who provided all this for us. That brought them over, and brought them to church again. Thus we fish patiently for men--and believe we get them.

Yesterday's congregation, at a town twenty miles from the mission, was one of the best I have had so far, paying the closest attention to all that was interpreted to them, saying they were sorry for all their wrong doings, of which it is not difficult to convict them by the Spirit's

aid. All knelt in prayer after the service. Then they expressed a strong desire to have us send them a teacher, who could tell them more about the things of God, for they said that they did not want to live in sin any longer, and wanted to know how they were to serve God.

I cannot tell you how my heart yearns over these people. Their understandings are so darkened and their lives so sinful. Just to preach the gospel to them occasionally will do little good, for they straightway forgot all they were taught. Constant teaching is their great need, until some of their own number will be able to teach their own people. To this end we are now laboring, to discover the best places in which to establish small schools, and then place one of our older boys there to teach and be a kind of Bible reader to them.

We believe that one of the strongest obstacles to our evangelistic work is the native gree-gree (devil) bush. Every boy and girl on reaching a certain age, must pass through the rites and ceremonies that are there carried on. When they leave this place, they seem ever afterward to be under its influence. No secret society binds its members more closely than does the devil bush; for never a word will they tell on one another as to their wrong-doing. Whipping, starving, imprisonment—none of these will compel them to divulge their secrets. The reason for this is that they believe if they do what they have been taught not to tell they will die at once. Since every native is afraid of death, he closely guards his tongue on these points, however loquacious he may be on others. What is done in these devil bushes is never known to an outsider. Should one try to learn them, he will be a marked man, and some day he will wake up and find himself a

dead man, as the Irish would say. The one fact that we have learned with regard to these secret societies is that they perform circumcision on every male child, but this is among the Congo people.

Because of this influence of the devil bush on the child's life, we deem it best to get possession of their children before they have been in these places, when it will be easier to bring them under the gospel's power, and we are therefore bending our energies in that direction for our future work.